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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

8 December 1955

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 86-55

SUBJECT: Soviet Intentions in Berlin

1. Recent Soviet and East German statements and actions affecting Berlin have implied that the USSR is abrogating the Four Power status of the city by transferring authority in the Soviet sector to the East German regime. These moves have naturally raised the question as to whether the Western Powers are to be faced again with an effort to force them out of Berlin, admittedly a long-held Soviet objective.
2. The new situation came to public attention on 29 November, when the Soviet commandant rejected responsibility for actions of GDR officials in the Soviet sector, asserting that the occupation status of East Berlin was at an end. The East German press subsequently reiterated this assertion, holding that the Western powers had by previous actions forfeited Four Power control of the city. In addition, Soviet transfer of barge licensing authority to the GDR, and GDR refusal to honor outstanding requests for license renewals, pending a new water traffic agreement with the Federal Republic "on the ministerial level", demonstrated an intention to back up these assertions with pressure.

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~~NO CHANGE IN CLASS.~~ ☒

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3. The positions which the Communists have placed on the record by these statements and actions appear to be in implementation of the Soviet-GDR agreement of 20 September. In the exchange of letters which accompanied the treaty granting "sovereignty" to the East German regime it was provided that:

- a. "The German Democratic Republic will carry out protection and control on its borders, on the demarcation line between the German Democratic Republic and the German Federal Republic, on the internal circle of greater Berlin, in Berlin, and also on communications between the German Federal Republic and West Berlin which lie on the territory of the German Democratic Republic.
- b. "The functions of issuing and drawing up the legal documents for navigation on the internal waterways of the German Democratic Republic, etc. will be carried out by organs of the German Democratic Republic."

4. Thus far the Communists have refrained from pressing a legal challenge to the Western occupation of West Berlin. In the document cited above care was taken to provide for "the movement of military personnel and goods of the garrisons of the three Western powers in West Berlin...on the basis of the existing four power decisions." More recent Communist statements have explicitly or implicitly recognized the fact of the continued Western presence in Berlin. An occasional ominous note has been sounded in East German propaganda media, but on the whole the East German spokesmen have been circumspect

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in limiting their claims to East Berlin alone.

5. Nevertheless, the Soviet actions can be interpreted to carry an implicit challenge to Western rights of occupation in Berlin. In the past, the Soviet argument has been that since the Western Powers have abandoned their Four Power obligations defined in the Potsdam agreements, their rights, allegedly dependent upon fulfillment of these obligations, including the right to occupy Berlin, can no longer be justified. It would be a short legal step from the relinquishment of Soviet legal rights in East Berlin to a demand for an abrogation of Western rights in West Berlin. This step, however, has not yet been taken.

SOVIET INTENTIONS

6. It is clear that a Soviet attempt to force abandonment of the Western position in Berlin would invalidate our current estimates of Soviet intentions. We have estimated that the Soviet leaders continue to desire a reduction of international tensions and that the main aim of their policy in Europe is to insure continuing acquiescence in the territorial status quo in Eastern Europe. We have also estimated that the objective of Soviet policy in Germany is to persuade the West Germans to enter into separate negotiations with East Germany and the USSR in the hope that West Germany might be led to abandon its ties with NATO.

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7. We believe that these estimates remain valid and that the USSR does not now intend to provoke a major crisis by challenging the West's presence in Berlin. The positive evidence provided by Communist statements and actions strongly suggest that the present Soviet intention in Berlin is limited to obtaining recognition and enhanced prestige for the East German regime. Since the unilateral grant of "sovereignty" to East Germany in March of 1954 a Soviet campaign to force recognition of its puppet regime by the Western Powers and the Federal Republic has been under way. The bilateral treaty of September 1955 provides a pretext for pushing harder along this line. The Soviet leaders probably believe that they will not be able to make a plausible case for their policy of rapprochement between the two parts of Germany until the Western Powers and the Federal Republic have taken the step of recognizing the GDR.

8. In permitting the GDR to press for recognition, the Soviet leaders will almost certainly exercise care to prevent a serious crisis situation from developing. Any moves designed to squeeze the Western allies out of Berlin would almost certainly in their view provoke strong Western counter-measures and thus risk the frustration of their objectives in Europe and in Germany. The Soviet leaders would almost certainly wish to restrain the GDR from provoking an issue which might require Soviet intervention since this would expose the insubstantiality of the GDR's pretence of sovereignty. Most importantly, they would wish to avoid any sudden or dramatic move, the consequences of which they would not be able to foresee.

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9. It is possible that from time to time incidents provoked by the GDR and its propaganda may seem to exceed the limits of the Soviet intentions described above. It would be natural for the GDR authorities to do this by way of building up their own prestige and more fully committing the USSR to support them. However, we think the Soviet authorities in Germany will be able to keep such manouvers within safe limits.

10. In NIE 11-13/1-55 approved on 6 December we estimated: "While there will remain various points of critical friction in Berlin, the Taiwan Strait, and Indo-China and perhaps elsewhere, we believe on balance that the USSR does not intend to allow a general East-West crisis of major proportions to grow out of these situations." Because of the very recent consideration of this subject by the IAC, and in view of the analysis of probable Soviet motives given above, we do not think that a special estimate on Berlin is indicated at this time.

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